

Wingspread: The battle continues

Levy: Porter Sesnon land should be a park

By KATHARINE BALL
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STAFF WRITERS

Supervisor Robley Levy, apparently dragged into a runoff election Tuesday by voters angered by her support of Wingspread, moved quickly yesterday to control the damage, writing a letter urging the full Board of Supervisors to get the State Parks Department to buy the Porter Sesnon property and annex it to New Brighton State Beach.

Yesterday, also, Wingspread developer Ryland Kelley declared firmly that the 66-acre property was not for sale. Kelley owns a 99-year lease he bought from the University of California, which holds title to the property. That lease makes Kelley the temporary owner, and the man with the right to sell the property until the lease expires.

Denied his more grandiose 468-room hotel with conference center and performing arts complex, Kelley said yesterday he still plans to build a 197-room hotel with a conference center at Porter Sesnon. He maintained his new proposal is in keeping with county zoning on the property.

In her June 8 letter, released to the press yesterday, Levy said, "Since the voters have rejected ... (Wingspread) so decisively, I believe that we should do everything possible to realize the first priority outlined in our Local Coastal Plan."

That top priority, she noted, is adding Porter Sesnon to New Brighton State Park.

Levy has no suggestions for where the cash to buy the land might come from, however.

The State Parks Department did attempt to buy Porter Sesnon in 1980, for its then-appraised value of \$4 million. But Kelley, still dreaming of building a large resort complex, said he wouldn't accept that price. Under state law, the parks department can pay no more than the appraised value.

While State Parks officials have said in recent weeks that they still want the property, the department does not currently have enough money to buy it.

The original \$4 million offered to Kelley eight years ago is set aside from a 1980 bond issue and still earmarked for Porter Sesnon, said Ross Henry, the department's chief of planning and local assistance.

Capitola makes Kelley an offer to annex site

By KATHY SALAMON
STAFF WRITER

The Capitola City Council last night offered to annex the Porter Sesnon property to the city.

The 66-acre site is adjacent to the city in the unincorporated area of the county. Developer Ryland Kelley's proposed Wingspread conference center was soundly rejected by county voters Tuesday, leaving the property's future up in the air.

Councilman Bob Bucher suggested the city write a letter to Kelley, who holds a 99-year lease on the land, to see if he wants to annex it to Capitola.

The city of Capitola has been outspoken in its criticism of Kelley's proposed hotel-performing arts center, and it seems unlikely that Kelley could gain anything from the anti-Wingspread Capitola council.

But Bucher said he was not joking when he suggested the letter. "I'm dead serious," he said.

There are some things Kelley could gain by annexing to the city, he said.

"Look at the problems he had with the county for the last eight years," Bucher said. "At least the city can give him an answer in six to eight weeks. In six weeks, if he gets approval, he can be through the process and starting construction."

Bucher said he would approve only projects consistent with the current coastal plan for the site.

The land is zoned for a park or recreational use, and one of the uses Kelley proposed in the event Wingspread was voted down was a large recreational vehicle park.

Bucher's suggestion was unanimously passed by the council, but other members of the council differed in their ideas of what projects they would approve.

"If we were to annex it," said Councilman Michael Routh, "I'd deny anything Kelley wants to put on it. Then I'd see that it goes to the state to be part of the state parks."

But the appraised value of Porter Sesnon has risen astronomically in the last eight years, as have property values all over the state. Unofficial estimates place the acreage's value at \$8 million to \$10 million. So for the state to come up with the cash may be a stiff challenge.

Levy suggests in her letter that the supervisors urge state Sen. Henry Mello and Assemblyman Sam Farr to go to bat for the county in Sacramento.

She also says County Administrative Officer George Newell should work toward getting the state to buy the land, as should the Planning Department.

In keeping with the binding nature of the vote against Measure A, Levy also says the county should withdraw its application to build Wingspread from consideration by the state Coastal Commission.

Levy said in an interview this morning that she would evaluate any project proposed by Kelley on its individual merits, but turning the property into a park seems to be the best option.

For any project Kelley proposed, Levy said, four standards would have to be met before she could give her approval. They are that the project be environmentally sound, give public access to the coast, provide a balance of benefits for the community and mitigate any adverse impacts.

But, she added, considering the results of Tuesday's election, "pursuit of the parkland seems to be the best for the community."